

What happens if I have a swallowing problem?

If your doctor suspects that you have a swallowing problem, you may be seen by a speech-language pathologist (SLP), a professional who specializes in swallowing and communication problems.

The SLP will complete a swallowing evaluation to assess the function of your swallow. This may include a fiberoptic endoscopic evaluation of swallowing (FEES), which is an examination completed with a scope in place, or a modified barium swallow (MBS), which is an examination completed with X-ray. You will be asked questions about your medical history and ability to swallow. The SLP will examine your mouth and ask you to complete tasks to examine the movement of mouth structures. You will then be asked to eat different foods or liquids to find out which type of swallowing problem(s) you may have.

If a swallowing problem is identified, you will receive a plan to help you manage it. You may be a candidate to participate in swallow therapy to improve your swallow function. Test results will be shared with you and your doctor. You will receive recommendations from the SLP and your doctor about your ability to swallow safely, the types of foods you can safely swallow, and special actions you can take to swallow safely.

For additional information, contact the JamesCare Voice and Swallowing Disorders Clinic at 614-293-0363.

JamesCare Voice and Swallowing Disorders Clinic

2050 Kenny Rd
Martha Morehouse Tower, 3rd floor
Columbus, OH 43221
614-293-0363

The James



cancer.osu.edu



The Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center — James Cancer Hospital and Solove Research Institute

Dysphagia: Difficulty Swallowing

The James



Dysphagia means problems swallowing. People who have trouble swallowing may have difficulty moving food or liquid from the mouth to the stomach safely and easily.

There are four stages of swallowing that will be explained below. A person may have problems during one or all of the stages.

Swallowing problems may lead to:

- Increased effort to eat and drink
- Poor nutrition
- Increased time needed to eat a meal
- Decreased safety when eating and drinking, which can lead to food or liquid going toward or into the airway

What is normal swallowing?

Every person swallows in a slightly different way. Many events must happen for normal swallowing to occur.

The four stages of swallowing are:

Stage I: Oral Preparation

The food is chewed, mixed with saliva and formed into a food ball called a bolus. Liquids are cupped by the tongue.

Stage II: Oral Transit

The food or liquid is moved to the back of the mouth by a squeezing and propulsion action, mostly completed by the tongue.

Stage III: Pharyngeal Phase

- The food enters the upper throat area, above the voice box.
- The soft palate, or back roof of your mouth, pulls up to close the nasal cavity.
- A small flap, called the epiglottis, is pushed over the top of the voice box. Your vocal folds and surrounding muscles squeeze together. This closes the opening to the trachea (windpipe).
- The back of the tongue moves backward and the throat walls move forward.
- These actions help force the food or liquid through the pharynx (throat) toward the esophagus (food tube) and help protect the airway.

Stage IV: Esophageal Phase

The food ball or liquid enters the esophagus and is moved to the stomach by a squeezing action.

Causes of Swallowing Problems

Swallowing problems inside the mouth and throat can happen from changes in function, sensation and behavior.

The most common factors involved in swallowing problems include:

- Head and neck cancer
- Brain disorders
- Head trauma
- Tracheostomy or on a ventilator

- Multiple medical problems
- Stroke
- Overall weakness
- Change in mental status
- Neurological disorders (e.g. Parkinson's and ALS)

Signs of Swallowing Problems

Swallowing problems may be present if you have:

- Coughing or choking when eating
- Trouble breathing or shortness of breath when eating
- Weak cough or weak voice
- Unintentional recent weight loss
- Increased time to eat meals
- Trouble managing your saliva, including drooling and choking on saliva
- Avoidance of some or all food or liquids
- Gurgling voice during or after eating
- Feeling things stick in your throat
- Mouth or face weakness
- Poor head control

